

How to reconcile climate change and economic growth of Nigeria



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D. Rudrappan, professor of Economics, Covenant University, an international faculty from India in the 34th Public Lecture of the institution provided answers to knotty issue of reconciling climate change and economic growth of Nigeria.

The lecture organised by the university to celebrate World Environment Day earlier this month focused attention on environmental challenges posed by the race for rapid economic growth among all countries of the world.

Rudrappan pointed out in his lecture that current economic growth of the world is based on high carbon intensity. Unbridled economic activities, industrialisation and urbanisation have led to an unimaginable increase in global warming leading to ex-

treme climate events. "As human welfare is inextricably linked to climate change, our response to climate instability is critical not only to the survival but also to our well-being". He said

Furthermore, he disclosed that under business as usual scenario, high consumption fossil fuel-based development path disturbs ecological balance, brings man made calamities and further can hasten the seismic / geological processes such as tsunami which may result in catastrophic destruction of earth's eco-systems threatening the future of mankind.

To him, climate change is a powerful force in shaping the life chances of poor people and climate related risks are a major cause of human suffering, poverty, and reduced opportunity which will lead to large scale hu-

man development reversals in the world's poorest countries. Thus, Climate shocks pose many undesirable consequences such as threats to health and nutrition, loss of savings and assets, damage to property, and loss of crops. The short term and long term cost of extreme climate events can have devastating consequences not only for economic and social development but also for human development.

Turning his attention from the world to African continent, the university Don highlighted that dangerous climate change has the capacity to deliver powerful systematic shocks to human development across poor countries though the industrialised nations are the major culprits of climate change.

Reports pointed out that the entire continent of Africa contributes only about four per cent of carbon dioxide emission. However, climate change caused by the engulfed carbon dioxide around the globe not only affects growth but also impacts human development in diminished productive potentials, lost opportunities for health and education and in lost vital ecological system which are likely to prove irreversible.

Deteriorating nutrition generates threats such as increased



Senate members of Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, in a group photograph with D. Rudrappan, (middle front row), professor of economics, and Aize Obayan (second from left), vice chancellor, Covenant University, after the 34th public lecture of the institution delivered by D. Rudrappan

vulnerability to illness and fewer resources for medical treatment. Research studies pointed out that Lesotho and Swaziland in South Africa reported reduced health spending among 50 per cent of household during the 2002 food crisis.

The state of reduced spending can have fatal consequences in the future life of poor people, particularly among children. Zimbabwe also demonstrated in its household survey analysis that climate shocks impact longevity of human development. The incidence of illness increased by 16 per cent among children whenever drought occurred and whenever there was flood, illness increased by 40 per cent.

The survey found that droughts between 1982 and 1984 had reduced average height of children by 2.3 cm and resulted in a loss of 0.4 years of schooling among children. Impact was severe among children in Zimbabwe because their households had few livestock to depend on which was considered as the main access to self insurance for poor people. Even this self insurance mechanism of poor people often failed when extreme events such as severe drought and flood destroy their livestock and other properties.

Human development traps

The above experience explains the transmission mechanism from climate shocks

through nutrition to stunted growth and educational deprivation into long run human development losses. Changes in agricultural yield as a consequence of climate change will force many people to migrate to other parts of the world leading to spread of diseases, displacement of people as environmental refugees, social conflicts and consequent increase in poverty levels. Besides direct and indirect impact of droughts, floods and other climate shocks, they also interact with wider forces that hold back the development of human capabilities. Self reinforcing cycle of low productivity, low income, low savings, and low investments perpetuate poverty trap.